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Written on JANUARY 16, 2013 AT 12:39 PM by VKREMER

Navy Medicine Maintains Readiness Despite Flu Season

Filed under CORPSMAN, FAMILIES, FLEET AND THE FLEET MARINE FORCE [NO COMMENTS]

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Hospital Corpsman 3rd Class Franz Malitig gives an influenza vaccine shot to Electricians Mate 2nd Class (CG 66), Nov. 6. Hue City is deployed to the U.S. 5th Fleet area of responsibility conducting major support missions as part of Operation Enduring Freedom. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Comm)

As influenza is nationally on the rise this flu season, our team in Navy Medicine is dedicated to answering the call by maintaining readiness and ensuring an adequate supply of vaccinations at our military treatment facilities for service members and beneficiaries.

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As a Navy Medicine public health emergency officer, I cannot emphasize enough the importance of getting vaccinated during this flu season, maintaining readiness, and prevention methods for the spread of the flu.

Vaccination is the primary method to reduce the risk of influenza by enhancing force immunity. It is not only a critical part of having a fit and ready fighting force to ensure readiness and force health protection, it's also an essential element of family readiness and sound preventive health care.

If you are an active duty Sailor or Marine, it is mandatory to get the flu vaccine, unless you have a medical or administrative exemption. To date, 94 percent of active duty Navy and 90 percent of active duty Marine Corps service members have received the flu vaccination.

There is currently a sufficient amount of flu vaccine at MTFs for Department of Defense civilians, beneficiaries, and eligible veterans. We have also not seen a decrease in beneficiary demand for the flu vaccine at our MTFs. All influenza virus strains tested so far are responsive to antivirals such as Tamiflu. MTF pharmacies have adequate amounts of Tamiflu on hand and additional Tamiflu is accessible if needed.

This year, most confirmed influenza cases in the U.S. have been of the H3N2 subtype, which historically is more severe than the H1N1 flu virus we saw last year. However, we have found that the 2012-13 vaccine is a good match to circulating strains, meaning the vaccine is working and indicators showed 62 percent vaccine effectiveness against an influenza-related medical visit.

While national levels of flu are concerning, it is also important to recognize it is not beyond peak levels seen historically during moderately severe flu seasons.

There are many ways you can help to reduce the risk of getting the flu. For instance, maintaining a clean work environment, good hygiene practices, and managing workforce exposure are some simple measures to reduce flu spread. Please ensure you, your patients, and your family gets the flu vaccine if you have not already.

For more information, see <http://www.cdc.gov>, <http://www.flu.gov>, and <http://www.vaccines.mil>.

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